

Source: US-Citizens Aviation Watch Association
Contact: Jack Saporito, (847) 506-0670
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CONGRESS' LAW WAS CAUSE OF AIR DELAYS

Chicago—The O'Hare representative for the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, Craig Burzych, was quoted Saturday (Nov. 10) in a Chicago newspaper¹ as declaring that the lifting of flight caps created the huge delays experienced by passengers last year.

These flight caps, or the "High-Density Rule" (also known as the "slot" rule), were instituted in 1969 at four of the nation's busiest airports -- O'Hare, JFK International, LaGuardia, and Washington National -- to help relieve delay and congestion. Since 1995 however, exceptions to the slot rule have been made, and increased delays have resulted. Then, in January 2000, Congress enacted the "Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century" ("AIR-21 Act")², which will phase out the High-Density Rule at these four airports. Within weeks after AIR-21 went into effect, hundreds of applications for additional flights were submitted to the Secretary of Transportation, resulting in hundreds of daily additional flights at LaGuardia, O'Hare, and possibly JFK and Reagan-National.

This greatly contributed to the huge, unprecedented level of delays that occurred last year, as confirmed by Mr. Burzych's statement. With caps lifted on the number of flights at these airports, the airlines engaged in the unrestrained overscheduling of flights, scheduling three to five or more times the number of flights that an airport could safely handle in a given time period. By definition, this caused great delays in the departures of the scheduled flights. A 1995 Department of Transportation report to Congress entitled "A Study of the High-Density Rule" predicted such widespread delays at major U.S. airports if the flight caps were removed. The study concluded that if the "slot" rule were to be relaxed, system-wide delays would follow.

Mr. Burzych also said that the cessation of "land and hold short" procedures as well as an increase in regional jets contributed to the delays.

There have been many problems with the controversial AIR-21 Act. In addition to creating the huge delays at O'Hare and LaGuardia airports, it also is severely harming environmental protection for tens of millions of people living and working in and around the New York, Chicago and Washington,

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D.C. metropolitan areas. This is because it was written so that the people affected could not use the National Environmental Policy Act's environmental evaluation and mitigation process to protect themselves from the serious pollution and resulting public health problems from the massive number of additional flights. It also reduces safety by allowing massive numbers of additional flights to further saturate the airspace above these cities.

“Because AIR-21 has been a failure for the most part and because of the events of September 11th, we now need to rescind AIR-21 and fully reinstate the High-Density Rule. Instead of continuing bad transportation policy that so favors one transportation mode over another at the taxpayers' and passengers' expense, we need to modernize our whole transportation system and now build a world-class high-speed rail system,” said Jack Saporito, President of US-Citizens Aviation Watch Association, an air transportation watchdog organization.

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(Editors Note: US-CAWA is a national organization representing approximately 1.5 million people in the United States. It also has members and affiliate organizations in at least twenty-seven other countries, as a non-governmental organization. More information can be found at: www.us-caw.org)

¹ McCoppin, Robert. Daily Herald: “South runway key in O’Hare plan, controllers say,” Nov. 10, 2001, p. 1.

² Public Law No: 106-181, became effective, 4/5/2000